

Preparing for the Unexpected



**Emergency Management Australia is a Division
of the Attorney-General's Department**

About Australia's Emergency Management System

Each State and Territory has its own plans, arrangements and organisations dedicated to dealing with emergencies. The Commonwealth Government assists the States and Territories to enhance their capabilities and also provides extra resources if requested.

If an emergency occurs, the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory Governments, emergency services, local governments, volunteer organisations and communities work together to respond to the emergency, save lives and property, and assist the community to recover.

Emergency services such as police, fire, ambulance and state emergency services have specially trained and equipped teams that can deal with a wide variety of emergencies and provide support and medical attention to you and others.

Foreword

Emergency situations, either natural or human caused, are a regular feature of life in Australia. Sadly, recent acts of terrorism have led us to consider other types of emergencies that we might need to prepare for.



Australia has sound and well-practised emergency management arrangements in all States and Territories to deal with emergencies and disasters. However, there are things you can do to promote your safety and reduce the risk of injury to yourself, your family and your property.

This booklet outlines some practical steps to help you be better prepared for an emergency and to let you know what to do if one occurs.

If you live or work in a part of Australia which sometimes experiences natural disasters — such as bushfires, floods, cyclones or severe storms — you may already be very familiar with the sorts of things you can do to prepare yourself for emergencies.

If you have never experienced a major emergency or thought about the impact it may have on you or your family, this booklet is designed to help you to identify issues and prepare for the unexpected.

Knowing what to do makes it easier to stay calm and confident in an emergency — preparation is the key.

A stylized blue ink signature of David Templeman, consisting of several fluid, connected loops and strokes.

David Templeman
Director General

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PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

What are the most important steps you can take?

Think about what might happen.

In thinking about what you and your family or household might do in an emergency, bear in mind that you may be in a situation where:

- you may be separated from each other
- normal communications might be difficult or impossible
- power supplies may be cut
- you may be injured, and others may be injured or deceased; and
- there may be fire or other dangerous elements present.

Talk with your family, household members and neighbours about things you could do.

Do some or all of the following suggested activities.

1. Involve your family or household

- Decide how family members will stay in touch in the event of, or after, an emergency.
- Agree on how you will contact each other if not at home, who will collect children from school, and who will check on elderly or disabled neighbours.
- Organise an out-of-town person your family or household members can contact in case you are separated. Make a list of that person's contact details (home, mobile



and work numbers, e-mail) and provide them to your workplace and to your children's school.

- Agree on a place for family or household members to meet if separated.
- Make arrangements for pets.

2. Store important documents safely

Store important documents including wills, passports, photos, birth and marriage certificates, powers of attorney and insurance policies in a fire and water-proof container or safe deposit box. Review your insurance policies to ensure they are current. If you keep them in your home, try to take them with you if you evacuate.

3. Learn about your home

Find out how and where to turn off electricity, gas and water supplies in your home.

4. Find out about your local emergency services

Make a record of your local emergency telephone numbers (State and Territory Emergency Service, local council, gas, electricity, water etc.) and keep them near your phone. Remember to dial 000 for Police, Fire and Ambulance.

5. Learn some basic first aid

Knowing the basics of first aid can be very useful in any emergency and you are encouraged to enrol in an accredited first aid course, such as those run by St John Ambulance and the Australian Red Cross. The information on pages 19 and 20, prepared in consultation with the Department of Health and Ageing, can help you to cope until professional medical assistance arrives.



6. Find out about emergency plans

- Your children's schools — find out if children will be kept at school or sent home on their own and how you can arrange for them to be picked up.
- Your workplace — check if your workplace has plans in place for emergency evacuations — and find out what you are meant to do.
- Your apartment building — check if your apartment building has plans in place for emergency evacuations and who is responsible for those plans.
- Local authorities may also have plans affecting your area.

7. Prepare an emergency kit and keep it handy

Keep the items listed below in your home so they can become your emergency kit for use in all types of emergencies:

- battery-operated radio (with spare batteries)
- torch (with spare batteries), candles and waterproof matches
- first aid kit and manual
- medications, toiletry and sanitary supplies
- special needs for infants, the aged and people with disabilities
- spare clothes and sleeping equipment, including strong shoes, broad brimmed hat, leather gloves and sunscreen for each household member
- a mobile phone, spare battery and charger
- strong plastic bags (for clothing, valuables, documents and photographs)
- extra car and house keys
- car emergency repair kit
- copies of important family documents (birth certificates, passports and licences)
- contact details for your agreed out-of-town contact
- playing cards or games; and
- a copy of this booklet.



If you have to remain in your home for several days following an emergency, and power, water or gas are not available, you should try to have the following at hand:

- a quantity of clean water in a sealed container and enough easily prepared packaged food to last for three days
- barbecue or portable stove with fuel
- duct or other wide tape and a sheet of plastic to seal doors and windows, scissors and a combination pocket knife; and
- fire extinguisher.



If you live in an area where there is a high risk of bushfires, floods, cyclones or other natural hazards, emergency management agencies will advise on specific contents for an emergency kit. Your local council can advise whether your area is subject to those risks.

WHAT TO DO IF AN EMERGENCY OCCURS

If an emergency occurs in your presence there are a number of things you can do.

- Call 000 and request attendance by emergency services. **DO NOT** assume others will do this.



- Seek reliable information about what is happening and advice from emergency services. This information may be provided:
 - in person by emergency services at the scene
 - via radio or television — a wailing siren sound may be broadcast to indicate that an urgent safety message is about to be made — this is the standard emergency warning signal, or
 - by telephone from call centres set up to advise people about the specific event — telephone numbers will be broadcast over radio and television.
- **DO NOT** call 000 for information, as the operator will not be able to provide it.
- Call your out-of-town contact but keep the conversation short to free up the lines for others who need them.
- Check on your neighbours, especially those who are elderly or disabled or who may not understand English well.
- You may be advised to stay in your house or to evacuate — in either case, follow the advice given by emergency services as it will be tailored to the circumstances.

- Should evacuation be advised, remember to take all your prescribed medications with you.
- Seek medical attention if you or anyone around you is injured — apply the basic first aid tips mentioned on pages 19 and 20 until professional medical assistance arrives.
- Check for any damage to your home, including fires and gas leaks, and shut off electricity, gas and water if necessary. In darkness, use a torch to find them — **DO NOT** light matches or candles or turn on electrical switches.

What to do in specific emergency situations

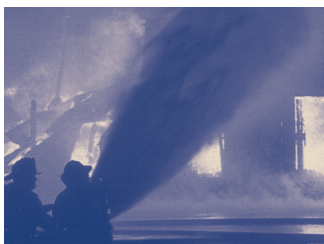
The following guidelines outline steps to take in response to some specific emergency situations.

1. Bomb explosion

- Get out of the building as quickly and calmly as possible.
- In the event of falling debris, shelter under a sturdy table or desk until the situation has stabilised enough for your safe passage. When safe, leave quickly, watching out for weakened floors and stairs.
- Ensure your own safety before trying to help others.
- If trapped in debris, do not light a match. Cover your mouth with a handkerchief or clothing. Rhythmically tap on a pipe or wall so rescuers can hear where you are.

2. Fire

- Stay low to the floor, as the smoke, poisonous gases and heat will rise to the ceiling.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth and protect any exposed skin.
- Vacate the building as quickly and safely as possible and proceed to the agreed assembly area.
- Do not go through closed doors that are hot — there may be fire on the other side.
- If you cannot escape, hang a light coloured sheet out the window to alert rescuers to your presence.



3. Receiving a suspicious package

If you receive a package that appears to be out of the ordinary, for example, from someone you do not know, or if it is badly wrapped, or if it has unusual contents, follow the steps below.

If you have not opened the package — **DO NOT** open it.

- Leave the package where it is.
- Get everyone out of the room and close the door. Isolate the room and prevent others from entering.
- Call 000 and ask for Police.
- Make a list of persons who were in the room to give to authorities when they arrive.
- If applicable, alert the building security staff or floor warden.
- Wait in a safe place until emergency services arrive and follow their instructions.



If you have opened a suspicious package — leave it where it is and cover it if possible.

- Get everyone out of the room and close the door. Isolate the room and prevent others from entering. If you are able, turn off air conditioning.
- If possible, wash your hands or shower with soap and water. Do not touch your mouth and eyes with your hands.
- Call 000 and ask for Police.
- If you are experiencing any immediate physical symptoms call 000 and ask for Ambulance.
- Make a list of persons who were in the room to give to authorities when they arrive.
- If applicable, alert the building security staff or floor warden.
- Wait in a safe place until emergency services arrive and follow their instructions.

4. Hazardous chemicals release



Hazardous chemicals can be released by accident or by a deliberate criminal act. They range from household chemicals and more toxic industrial chemicals through to highly toxic chemical warfare agents.

Exposure could cause serious or fatal injury. Emergency services will identify the hazard and tell you what to do.

You may be asked to either remain in the protection of your home or workplace and seal windows and doors, or to evacuate the area.

If the chemicals are heavier than air, emergency services may ask you to move to higher ground.

For your safety, in all circumstances, listen to advice from emergency services.

If a spill or other chemical release occurs it is important to:

- stay away from the scene
- attempt to get upwind of the contaminated area, and
- call 000 and ask for Fire.

If you are asked to stay inside your home:

- stay inside and close and lock all windows and external doors — however, ensure your keys are readily available, or that you have an accessible escape route if you need to evacuate
- if advised by emergency services, turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems
- close the fireplace vent
- close internal doors to reduce air movement
- gather your emergency kit and make sure the radio is working
- go to an internal room, ideally one at ground level with no windows
- if advised to do so, use duct tape or other wide tape to seal all cracks around the doors and any vents into the room — seal over windows with plastic and tape; and
- continue to monitor your radio or television until you are told all is safe or you are advised to evacuate — emergency services may later call for the evacuation of specific areas in your community and issue specific instructions.

If you believe a toxic chemical has been released in a closed space such as a tunnel, underground railway or a building:

- move away quickly to an upwind location nearby to avoid the spread of contamination and try not to inhale fumes

- call 000 and ask for Fire
- if you have any of the chemical on you or your clothes, avoid touching your mouth and eyes — remove your outer clothing and do not leave the area — for your own safety and that of others you will then need to be decontaminated by emergency services before you receive any medical treatment that may be necessary
- to assist emergency services to identify the chemical, keep track of your symptoms including your breathing, heart rate, perspiration, dizziness, blurred vision, skin tones and deliriousness, and report them as soon as possible; and
- use caution in helping others who may be contaminated as you may become affected.

5. Biological agent release

Biological agents are bacteria, viruses or biological toxins that can be released by accident or deliberately dispersed in a population to cause injury or death. Some are infectious and can be passed from person to person.

If biological agents are released without any warning, the first indication that a release has taken place may be the reporting of symptoms by those affected. If you experience any unusual symptoms, you should seek medical attention.



If you are at a site where emergency services advise that there has been a deliberate release of a biological agent, you should comply with their directions.

You may need to be decontaminated to remove any agent from your clothing and skin. Emergency services and health authorities will assess and manage the risks for anyone who has potentially been exposed to a biological agent.

Health authorities may recommend treatment with antibiotics if you have been exposed. Pay close attention to all official health instructions.

6. Radiological incident

The likelihood of a radiological incident of any kind is extremely remote due to the stringent controls in place for the movement and use of radioactive materials.

However, a radiological emergency could result from either an accidental or deliberate release of radioactive materials. Exposure to radiation can have serious adverse health effects.

If you are outside at the time of the incident:

- move away and upwind of the incident site
- call 000 and ask for Fire
- wait for instructions from emergency services
- if you think you have been contaminated, ensure you advise emergency services on their arrival; and
- you may have to undergo preliminary decontamination under supervision of emergency services, including removal of your outer clothing and rinsing your hair and body in a shower.

If you are inside at the time of the incident, remain inside and follow the instructions on pages 11, 12 and 13 about a chemical release.

Public health authorities will assess the risk from radiation exposure quickly and will implement measures to limit the dangers.

If you are asked to evacuate your area

- When directed by emergency services, turn off the electricity, gas and water, unplug appliances, lock doors and windows.
- Take your emergency kit with you, including important documents, or as much as you can manage.
- Listen for emergency warnings and safety advice on radio or television.
- Leave as quickly as possible as you may become more endangered the longer you stay.
- Allow for special needs of infants, the aged and people with disabilities.
- Do not forget your pets.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, a hat and sturdy shoes so you can be protected as much as possible.
- If you have a mobile phone, take it with you.



- Collect family members or go to your agreed meeting place.
- Use travel routes specified by emergency services. Do not use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous.
- Stay away from fallen power lines.
- If you go to an evacuation centre, register your details at the registration desk.
- If you evacuate to a relative or friend's house, consider registering with the local evacuation centre to help others find you.
- Call your out-of-town contact and let them know where you are going.
- Follow the instructions issued by emergency services.
- When you return to your home after being told it is safe to do so, open windows to provide ventilation.



HOW TO COPE EMOTIONALLY

Natural reactions

People react to emergencies in many ways. You will need to understand your emotions and help others to cope with theirs. Reactions can include:

- shock and disbelief
- fear and anxiety
- horror, and
- depression, anger and grief.

What to do

You need to remain calm so you can control your fear and actions. Remember that someone may need your help. If you are feeling particularly anxious or frightened, follow this advice:



- keep your family together wherever possible
- ensure shelter and safety is maintained in the coming hours and days
- comfort each other and support those who are with you or have come together during or after the emergency
- focus on your feelings and any irrational thoughts — talk calmly about them with family or friends
- focus on what practical tasks you and your family can do — practical actions are helpful and will lessen anxiety
- take some satisfaction in having come through a very stressful and threatening situation
- monitor information from emergency services by listening to your radio or television — **DO NOT** continuously watch disturbing footage on television, take turns listening to the news with other adult members of your family or household

- if separated from family members, find out where they are and arrange to reunite with them when it is safe to do so; and
- when the danger has passed, check if your neighbours are distressed — talk to them about their experiences.

Following the emergency you may experience a range of physical and emotional reactions. This is normal.

However, should they continue for an extended period, consult your local health service. State and Territory health authorities have professionals who can help you deal with the psychological aspects of the emergency.

Helping children

After an emergency, children are most afraid that the event will happen again, someone will get hurt or injured, they will be separated from the family, or that they will be left alone.

To help children cope:

- comfort and re-assure them
- keep them with you
- explain what is happening and what they may be feeling
- encourage them to talk about what happened, and respond simply and clearly to their questions
- let them help
- avoid exposure to excessive television replays of events; and
- provide normal activities such as school and shared family activities as soon as possible, when safety is assured.

Positive actions and attitudes, comforting yourself and others, will help adults, families and children deal with emergencies.

FIRST AID TIPS

Please remember the basic first aid steps set out below are not a complete first aid guide. The best people to handle any medical emergency are health professionals.

Six key steps

If someone is injured, six key steps will help keep everyone at the scene as safe as possible until professional help arrives.

1. Make sure the situation is safe, for example, keep clear of power lines, gas, smoke and fire.
2. If the injured person is unconscious and not responding, or if the incident has not otherwise been reported, call 000 immediately and ask for Ambulance.
3. If the person is not breathing, remove any blockage to the airway. If you (or any bystander) have the necessary skills, commence cardio-pulmonary resuscitation.
4. Attend to severe bleeding or shock, and then care for injuries to muscles, bones and joints.
5. Monitor the injured person's condition while waiting for professional assistance to arrive.
6. Help the person rest in the most comfortable position and give reassurance.

Bleeding

- Cover the wound with a dressing or clean cloth and place direct pressure on it.
- Encourage the person to lie down if necessary.
- Raise the injured part above the level of the heart, but take great care if you suspect a broken bone.

- Cover the dressing with a bandage to hold it in place.
- If the bleeding does not stop, apply additional dressings, pads and bandages on top of existing ones.

Burns

- Cool the burn with plenty of clean, cold water (except for burns that are charred, whitish or deep).
- Do not break blisters.
- Gently remove rings, watches, belts or tight clothing.
- Cover burned areas with dry, clean, non-stick dressings or cloth.
- Treat for shock as required.

Shock

- Keep the victim from getting either cold or overheated.
- Raise the legs about 30cm, if you don't suspect broken bones.
- Do not give food or drink.

Injuries to muscles, bones and joints

- Rest the injured part, avoid movements that cause pain.
- Immobilise the injured part before moving the victim or giving additional care.
- Apply ice or a cold pack to reduce swelling and pain.
- Raise the injured area to slow the flow of blood and reduce swelling.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

To request additional copies of *Preparing for the Unexpected*, or for further information to that contained in this booklet, or for other information on how to prepare for the most common natural hazards that occur in Australia, contact Emergency Management Australia at:

Telephone: 1800 262 222
Internet: www.ema.gov.au
E-mail: preparing@ema.gov.au
Mail: Emergency Management Australia
Attention: Media Liaison
Attorney-General's Department
PO Box 1020
Dickson ACT 2602

The information contained in this booklet is also available in braille and on audiocassette by calling 1800 644 885.

You can also obtain information on Australia's national security arrangements from www.nationalsecurity.gov.au or the National Security Hotline 1800 123 400.

In addition, the following websites may also be helpful:
www.health.gov.au — Department of Health and Ageing
www.ag.gov.au — Attorney-General's Department; and
www.redcross.org.au — Australian Red Cross.

www.ema.gov.au